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Comprehensive approach to mine action

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. Security Council resolution 2365 (2017), adopted on 30 June 2017, was the first stand-alone resolution on mine action. Its adoption by the Council reaffirmed the criticality of mine action to the peace and security agenda, humanitarian emergency response and sustainable development while also recognizing the positive contribution that mine action makes to stabilization and sustaining peace.

2. The present report is submitted pursuant to the request, made by the Security Council in resolution 2365 (2017), that the Secretary-General report on the implementation of the resolution within a year. It provides an overview of the United Nations response to the threat posed by landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, and of significant developments and trends in mine action. Covering the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 April 2018, the report draws on data and analysis provided by the United Nations Mine Action Service and other parts of the United Nations system, including peace operations, as well as by Member States.

II. Significant developments and trends

3. Instruments of international law continued to provide a bulwark against the proliferation of explosive weapons during the reporting period. Afghanistan ratified the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and the five Protocols thereto, in particular Protocol V, which establishes a State's responsibility to assist with the clearance of explosive remnants of war resulting from a conflict in which it participated. The State of Palestine became the ninety-fourth High Contracting Party to Protocol V, while Benin and Sri Lanka joined the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The universalization of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, an important cornerstone of international humanitarian law, was bolstered by the joining of Sri Lanka and the State of Palestine in December 2017, which brought the number of States parties to an encouraging 164. On 18 September 2017, Algeria destroyed its last anti-personnel landmines, fulfilling its obligation under the Convention.

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4. Unfortunately, active conflicts continue to add to the existing contamination of land with explosives, offsetting the clearance efforts of the United Nations, Member States, non-governmental organizations and other partners. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines, in its publication *Landmine Monitor 2017*, recorded 8,605 casualties from mines, explosive remnants of war and victim-operated improvised explosive devices, more than twice as many as the 2014 figure.[1] At least 2,089 of those casualties were killed. The total comprised mostly casualties recorded in armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya, Ukraine and Yemen. Given the severity of the conflicts in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and the difficulty of gathering accurate data during active conflicts, it is probable that the actual number of casualties is much higher.

5. It is not known exactly how many improvised explosive devices are emplaced or produced. However, improvised explosive devices are responsible for the recent worldwide rise in casualties from explosive ordnance. *Landmine Monitor 2017* recorded 1,805 casualties from victim-operated improvised explosive devices, which are explosive weapons produced in an improvised manner and designed to explode from the presence, proximity or contact of their victim. That represents the highest annual total of such casualties since *Monitor* reporting began in 1999.[2] Moreover, research suggests that victims of improvised explosive devices are several times more likely to die or suffer multiple amputations than landmine victims.[3] In 2017, Afghanistan experienced a monthly average of 170 victims of mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices — its highest recorded monthly average since 2001. In particular, the overwhelming majority of victims of explosive remnants of war were children. Victim-operated improvised explosive devices were responsible for 10 per cent of all civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

6. I continue to be alarmed at the urbanization of armed conflict, with the majority of civilian casualties from the indiscriminate use of explosive devices now occurring in urban centres. Residential areas in several affected States continue to be littered with vast amounts of explosive remnants of war, including improvised explosive devices. In Iraq, the density, complexity, variety and quantity of explosive remnants of war, including unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices, encountered in Mosul, particularly the Old City, is unprecedented. Until this unconscionable level of contamination is cleared, urgent humanitarian response efforts will be hampered and civilians cannot safely return home. Given the extent of contamination and the amount of rubble and debris, it is estimated that the clearance process will take at least 10 years to complete.

7. Hostilities in the Syrian Arab Republic, which is suffering one of the most devastating conflicts of modern times, continued unabated during the reporting period. Between January 2015 and February 2018, an average of 162 explosives incidents per day were reported in the country. Nearly half of all conflict-related injuries in the Syrian Arab Republic resulted from such incidents[4]. Explosive weapons continued to be used indiscriminately and systematically in populated urban and rural areas, particularly affecting internally displaced persons and those voluntarily returning to unsafe areas. The decontamination of those areas from unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices is a vital first step in making villages and cities safe for return. Limited access to communities in need, caused in part by ongoing hostilities in the country and the presence of explosive ordnance, impeded

[1] See http://www.the-monitor.org/media/2615219/Landmine-Monitor-2017_final.pdf.

[2] Ibid.

[3] See http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/7/7/e014697.full.pdf.

[4] See "Physical rehabilitation needs and services for persons with injuries and disabilities", Humanity and Inclusion, issue brief — Syria (April 2018), available at https://hi.org/sn_uploads/content/HI_IssueBrief_Syria_-_REHABILITATION_april2018.pdf.

mine action responses and forced humanitarian organizations to suspend activities on multiple occasions to ensure the safety of their personnel.

8. The ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine has led to widespread explosives contamination in that part of the country, posing a significant risk to the population. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that during the period from 16 August 2017 to 15 February 2018, more than twice as many civilians were killed by remaining explosives as were killed owing to active hostilities.[5]

9. Even when active hostilities decrease in intensity, and for years and often decades after they have ceased, landmines and explosive remnants of war continue to pose a threat to civilians. For example, despite the fact that a ceasefire was signed in Cambodia more than 25 years ago, 2017 was the first year to witness a full month without any recorded casualties from landmines or unexploded ordnance.

10. The impact of landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices is not limited to civilians. Peacekeeping operations are increasingly mandated to operate in dangerous and complex environments. In November 2017, I appointed Lieutenant General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz (retired) of Brazil to propose practical and effective recommendations to reduce the number of fatalities and injuries among peacekeeping personnel. Significantly, in his report, he highlighted the fact that the use of small arms, improvised explosive devices, vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices and landmines resulted in the majority of fatalities among peacekeepers.

11. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) operates in an asymmetrical threat environment in which United Nations peacekeepers and Malian defence and security forces are regularly targeted with improvised explosive devices. Since 2014, MINUSMA has had the highest fatality rates of any United Nations peace operation, which has prompted the Mission to adopt a more robust posture and implement a series of measures to enhance its ability to deter and counter the threats. The complexity of attacks and the quantity of explosives used in Mali increased in 2017, and the emplacement methods have become more effective; those trends are likely to worsen in the future. A notable spike in the monthly rate of improvised explosive device incidents in Mali since November 2017 could, if sustained, see the number of incidents in 2018 nearly double compared with the previous year. While improvised explosive device attacks are targeted principally at security forces, the number of civilian victims has been increasing steadily as the threat has moved into the more populated areas of central Mali.

III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 2365 (2017)

12. In resolution 2365 (2017), the Security Council expressed grave concern over the serious and lasting threat posed by landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices not only to civilians, but also to peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel. Seeking action, the Council called upon Member States, the United Nations system, relevant institutions and other stakeholders to continue making progress in protecting civilians, increasing the threat mitigation capacity of peacekeepers, enhancing mandate planning and delivery, sustaining peace, strengthening national capacities and promoting effective partnerships. This section highlights efforts made in the implementation of the resolution during the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 April 2018.

[5] See OHCHR quarterly reports on the human rights situation in Ukraine, available at http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARegion/Pages/UAReports.aspx.

Protection of civilians

13. Preventing and resolving conflicts and building sustainable peace are my overarching priorities for the protection of civilians. Where preventing conflict or sustaining peace fails, we must make every effort to protect the lives, human rights and dignity of civilians caught up in conflict or its aftermath. Mine action protects civilians by mitigating the threat posed by landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, including by assessing the risks of such devices and clearing their homes and communities, providing risk education and raising risk mitigation awareness, assisting victims with services and rehabilitation and making roads accessible again to communities and for the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

14. The Territory of Western Sahara, where both sides of the 1,465-km berm that divides the area are contaminated with landmines and explosive remnants of war, remains one of the most heavily mined areas in the world. During the reporting period, the Mine Action Service cleared contamination from more than 5 km^2 of land, enabling the nomadic and local populations living in the area to move freely with their livestock and allowing United Nations military observers to monitor the ceasefire between the Royal Moroccan Army and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro Military Forces.

15. By prioritizing survey and clearance activities, peace operations serve to protect civilians by removing the immediate threat as well as by enabling the mobility of mission personnel, including peacekeeping troops. The United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei cleared more than 360 km of roads during the reporting period, allowing for more patrols by peacekeepers and facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Cleared land allowed the mission to establish additional peacekeeping bases and team sites, thereby increasing its ability to achieve mandate objectives. As a result, a more robust mission presence contributed to a decrease in the number of violent incidents.

16. Clearance is also a key activity in the process of liquidating peacekeeping operations. As the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was drawing down in advance of its closure on 15 October 2017, the Mine Action Service was called upon to destroy the expired and unserviceable ammunition of repatriating military and police units, and to clear a site that had been used for the demolition of expired ammunition and explosives. That support was essential for MINUSTAH to ensure future use of the site without risk to civilians. Similar action undertaken for the closure of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire on 30 June 2017 led to the inclusion of such necessary support in the Department of Field Support mission liquidation manual.

17. In areas where hostilities are ongoing or clearance activities have not yet been completed, the risk posed to civilians by explosive remnants of war can be reduced by making the population aware of the threat and encouraging behaviour that reduces the risk to people, property and the environment. In Somalia during the reporting period, 50 new community liaison officers were deployed to deliver risk education messages promoting safe behaviour in areas where civilians are at risk. Those officers, of whom 60 per cent were recruited from at-risk youth and 9 per cent were female, reached civilians, including humanitarian workers and State officials, in 263 communities. Of those receiving risk education, 40 per cent were female.

18. In Darfur, risk education teams reached out to local communities in village squares, places of worship, schools and camps for internally displaced persons. Children were specifically targeted, as they constitute the majority of casualties from explosives. To reach nomads, who are particularly vulnerable to the threat posed by

explosive ordnance, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) also provided risk education along traditional grazing routes. In total, risk education teams in Darfur conducted 1,685 separate sessions, reaching more than 100,000 persons since July 2017, including 22,500 men, 20,000 women, 35,000 boys and 28,500 girls. An additional 500,000 persons, of whom more than 47 per cent were children, were educated by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and partners in Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria, which are affected by the Boko Haram terrorist group. UNICEF also provided risk education to more than 1.8 million civilians in Yemen, which has recently seen large-scale contamination with explosive remnants of war.

19. For displaced persons, multiple exposures to accurate information on explosive threats are needed well in advance of any decision to return home. Mine action actors in Iraq coordinated the content of risk education materials within the mine action area of responsibility of the Protection Cluster as well as with the Government of Iraq, to ensure that the messaging delivered was consistent while avoiding duplication of efforts. Where access to education is delineated by gender, the Mine Action Service works specifically with female risk education volunteers to spread lifesaving educational messages to women, who play a critical role in instilling safe behaviour among their children and peers.

20. The United Nations supports Member States in integrating victim assistance into broader national policies, plans and legal frameworks related to disability, health, education, employment, development and the reduction of poverty. In Libya, the Mine Action Service coordinated with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to organize the first workshop on victim assistance for Libya, held in Tunis in July 2017. Libyan and international stakeholders from the health, education and mine action sectors discussed their strategies, roles and responsibilities to address the needs of people injured by explosive weapons in the country, leading to a commitment by the Libyan Mine Action Centre to facilitate the development of a Libyan-owned victim assistance strategy.

21. The United Nations also provides support to victims of landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, as well as to their families and communities. UNAMID partnered with a local non-governmental organization to identify 50 victims for targeted assistance with income generation and social reintegration in Darfur, including by setting up small-scale commercial activities such as grocery shops, animal husbandry and water vending. Improving the socioeconomic position of survivors helps to reintegrate victims into their communities by enabling them to contribute to the economic development of their societies, in keeping with the imperative of the Sustainable Development Goals to "leave no one behind".

Protecting peacekeepers

22. More than 100,000 men and women working in United Nations peace operations risk their lives to improve those of others. In 2017, 59 of them lost their lives as a result of malicious acts involving the use of explosive devices, and 150 more were injured. Ensuring the safety of peacekeeping personnel must be a top priority, and providing them with the right training, knowledge and equipment to mitigate the threat posed by explosive weapons is an important part of that commitment.

23. In Mali, MINUSMA has sustained more than 350 casualties since its creation in 2013, of whom 65 were killed as a result of attacks using explosives, which have increasingly included improvised explosive devices. To better prepare troops for operations in a high explosive threat environment, the Mine Action Service has implemented a comprehensive improvised explosive device threat mitigation framework. It consists of tailored predeployment and in-theatre training and

mentoring, technical and strategic advice and the provision of specialized equipment, including metal detectors with ground-penetrating technology, remotely operated robots and mine-protected vehicles. To strengthen capacity among troop-contributing countries and promote sustainability, during the reporting period more than 100 national experts were trained to deliver predeployment training. Once deployed, troops continue to receive specialized in-theatre training and mentoring to support the gradual application of the required tactics, techniques and procedures. This comprehensive approach has helped to reduce the rate of MINUSMA casualties from improvised explosive devices by 50 per cent since 2016. It has also increased the ability of MINUSMA troops to detect improvised explosive devices before detonation, from a device detection rate of 11 per cent in 2014 to a rate of 40 per cent in the first months of 2018. With MINUSMA remaining the most frequently targeted mission, these efforts save lives and improve mission mobility and mandate implementation.

24. In Somalia, comprehensive threat mitigation efforts have also yielded positive effects. During the reporting period, the Mine Action Service trained more than 15,000 troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in improvised explosive device threat mitigation and another 800 troops in specialized search techniques, thereby increasing the capacity of AMISOM to operate in high-risk environments. The Mine Action Service also provided specialized equipment, including metal detectors and explosive ordnance disposal suits. Advisory materials distributed in Amharic, English, French and Somali reached peacekeepers in more than 100 field locations, and AMISOM teams surveyed more than 6,000 km of roads. Civilians as well as peacekeepers throughout the AMISOM area of operations were protected through the searching and securing of 680 buildings and 13 km^2 of open area during the reporting period, including with the help of 34 explosive detection dogs. This package of measures contributed to the decline in the number of AMISOM casualties per improvised explosive device incident from 2.42 in 2015 to 1.26 in 2016 and 1.10 in 2017.

25. In the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), where landmines and other explosive remnants of war continue to pose a threat to peacekeepers, the mission safely disposed of more than 1,000 anti-personnel mines during the reporting period and provided safety briefings to approximately 600 United Nations military and civilian personnel. Nearly 4,000 members of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) received similar training.

Mine action in United Nations response planning and reporting

26. United Nations operations are quicker and more effective, and lives are saved, when the threat posed by landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices is considered from the earliest stages of planning and programming. In Darfur, UNAMID and the United Nations country team have jointly prepared for the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, including through the surveying and clearance of explosive remnants of war from abandoned areas. This practice has served to protect those coming back to their homes and has validated the concept of safe return for those still waiting to go back. During the reporting period, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) also consistently included provisions for mine action in planning the establishment and closure of operating bases and protection-of-civilians sites, ensuring the surveying and clearance of the areas and improving the safety of future occupants.

27. The threat posed by mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, and the need for mine action, were reflected in the majority of relevant Humanitarian Response Plans in 2017 and 2018. Clearance facilitated humanitarian

access to populations in need, and risk education was delivered to more than 80 per cent of targeted beneficiaries in both Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Data on explosives contamination assists in defining protection needs, and detailed information on known explosives contamination, where available, enables the humanitarian community to gain critical situational awareness, which increases the safety of its activities.

28. The Government of Libya and the United Nations have fully integrated mine action into their consultations on the United Nations strategic framework for the biennium 2019–2020 as part of a renewed partnership towards a more sustainable path to development, prosperity, peace and security. Mine action considerations have also been taken into account in the preparation of the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2018 and the planning of emergency assistance in the country.

29. Reporting on the scale of the problem and the activities undertaken to address it has been incorporated into periodic reports to the Security Council on peacekeeping operations and special political missions, as well as thematic reports such as those on the protection of civilians. Information on incidents and threat mitigation activities is broken down by location, gender and age where possible, to provide for a better understanding of the impact on the population and better prioritization of clearance activities and risk education.

Sustaining peace

30. In 2016, in General Assembly resolution 70/262 and Security Council resolution 2282 (2016), the twin resolutions on the review of the peacebuilding architecture, Member States stressed that sustaining peace was imperative to preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict. Mine action programmes, by facilitating the reconstruction of public services, fostering sustainable development and preventing weapons and explosive material from being harvested for use by armed groups, are an essential first step towards an environment of peace and stability, underscoring the criticality of mine action to the security-development nexus.

31. Mine action allows for progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by contributing to peaceful and inclusive societies and effective institutions (Goal 16.1) as well as accelerating progress towards the achievement of several others of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The cultivation of contaminated land, to alleviate poverty and prevent hunger (Goals 1 and 2), can occur only after that land has been cleared of explosive remnants of war. Children in post-conflict settings can return to school to receive a quality education (Goal 4) only after explosives contamination has been removed. Access to clean water and affordable energy (Goals 6 and 7) have a chance only if relevant infrastructure is made safe before it is restored to working order. In recognition of the role that mine action plays to support sustainable development, I welcome efforts by affected States, including Afghanistan and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, to adopt a mine-action-specific national goal or indicator.

32. By providing quick peace dividends to conflict-affected communities, mine action leads to critical confidence- and trust-building, even across conflict lines. Given the impact of mine action as an early post-conflict gain, it is essential that consideration be given to it, including relevant mine action provisions, in peace agreements during the earliest stages of negotiations. In the 2016 Agreement on the Bilateral and Definitive Ceasefire and the Cessation of Hostilities and the Laying down of Arms between the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo demining was recognized as a prerequisite for post-conflict rural development and as possible employment for

ex-combatants undergoing socioeconomic reintegration. With support from the United Nations and other partners, including through the Peacebuilding Fund, the demining organization Humanicemos Desminado Humanitario increased its capacity to reintegrate ex-combatants through employment in the mine action sector. The project is aimed at reintegrating up to 146 people, with women accounting for 20 per cent of participants. Helping to remove the landmines that they participated in laying is also a notable way for ex-combatants to provide reparation to victims.

33. During the reporting period, the United Nations facilitated talks and other contacts between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities on a settlement agreement. As part of a package of confidence-building measures, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus cleared priority minefields agreed to by the leaders of both sides, highlighting the positive role that mine action plays in building confidence between parties negotiating peace agreements. The Mine Action Service provided training and advice on areas contaminated with landmines and explosive remnants of war and on assistance in metal detection to members of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, enabling the Committee to contribute to the overall process of reconciliation between the two communities in a safe manner.

34. Mine action in the Central African Republic has facilitated the implementation by MINUSCA of community violence reduction and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes with armed groups, in support of the political process, through the safe destruction of weapons and ammunition. The Mine Action Service supported the Central African national authorities, through the provision of infrastructure and training, in safely managing and storing weapons and ammunition. Such support is critical to facilitating the progressive redeployment of the defence and internal security forces throughout the country and paving the way for the eventual exit strategy of the United Nations peacekeeping presence. This increased national capacity was a deciding factor in the approval of requests for exemptions to the arms embargo, pursuant to Security Council resolution 2399 (2018), that were submitted to the Security Council during the reporting period.

Strengthening national capacity

35. The safety and security of civilians is the responsibility of Member States, and the United Nations assists Member States where requested in building their mine action capacity to fulfil that responsibility.

36. In Afghanistan, the United Nations has worked to enhance the technical and support capacity and strategic direction and coordination functions of the national Directorate of Mine Action Coordination. With the transfer of more than 100 United Nations national staff to the Directorate, it now has the capacity to manage the Afghan mine action programme. The United Nations now plays a supporting role, providing technical and management advice and assisting the Directorate in developing national mine action standards in line with the International Mine Action Standards, to which all government implementing partners must adhere when performing mine action operations in the country.

37. In cooperation with other partners, the United Nations provided essential support for the establishment of an independent and accountable Somali Explosive Management Authority to coordinate, manage and regulate mine action efforts in Somalia. Under the Badbaado (Protection) Plan for explosive-hazard management in Somalia, which is aimed at compliance with the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention by 2022, the Government of Somalia has taken full ownership over the Information Management System for Mine Action and improved its understanding of the impact of explosives contamination on communities.

38. The gradual building of explosive ordnance disposal capacity within the Somali Police Force will be critical in the lead-up to the presidential elections in 2021. The Mine Action Service enhanced the operational capacity of the Somali police during the reporting period by training and advising explosive ordnance disposal personnel in Mogadishu, Kismayo and Dhuusamarreb and by equipping newly trained explosive ordnance disposal teams with robots and specialized suits for explosive ordnance disposal, as well as with vehicles. Assistance in developing a comprehensive weapons and ammunition management system in line with sanctions obligations, including the necessary legal frameworks, policies and procedures, is designed to allow for a partial lifting of the arms embargo currently in place and has allowed the Government of Somalia to improve its reporting to the Security Council.

39. Iraqi mine action authorities, which have a wealth of mine clearance experience, are increasingly focusing on the response to improvised explosive devices, which are frequently found in liberated areas. In Anbar province during the reporting period, the United Nations provided advice and training on the identification, marking and disposal of improvised explosive devices, and the programme is being expanded to Ninawa and Kirkuk provinces. Such capacity is particularly important in areas where people are returning to their houses and communities, serving as a prerequisite for reconstruction and development activities.

Partnership

40. To optimize the results delivered by mine action activities as well as the use of donor funds, the United Nations cooperates with a number of trusted partners at the global and national levels. In February 2018, the Mine Action Service planned and coordinated the 21st annual International Meeting of National Mine Action Programme Directors and United Nations Advisers at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. This annual meeting brings together Member States, national mine action authorities, the United Nations, civil society, academia and the private sector to share best practices, strengthen partnerships and initiate new collaborations. The theme of the meeting, "Advancing protection, peace and development", highlighted the critical role of mine action in humanitarian action, peacebuilding and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

41. Following the signing of a memorandum of understanding by the African Union Commission and the Mine Action Service in April 2017, the United Nations and the African Union further strengthened their partnership in mine action. The United Nations Office to the African Union continued to provide technical guidance for the implementation of the African Union Mine Action and Explosive Remnants of War Strategic Framework and supported the Union's ammunition safety management pilot project, carrying out interventions in Guinea-Bissau and Malawi. The Mine Action Service and the African Union jointly published a safety handbook on landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, in five languages. The handbook was distributed to African Union member States and to peace support operations in Mali, Somalia, Abyei and Darfur to educate soldiers and raise awareness of the threat posed by explosive devices.

42. In humanitarian emergencies, cooperation between United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations through the mine action area of responsibility of the Global Protection Cluster ensures a more integrated, accountable and effective mine action response. The systematic integration of mine action into humanitarian planning and appeals, where relevant, allows for the factoring of risks related to explosive threats into all humanitarian operations, especially in new emergencies when a country-level area of responsibility may not have yet been activated.

43. In Myanmar, the cooperation of 10 ministries and more than 40 national and international civil society actors and United Nations agencies has led to an environment that is increasingly conducive to mine action as well as enhanced practical coordination. Illustrating the benefits of such coordination for the beneficiaries of mine action activities, the jointly developed mine risk education toolkit has enabled more than 321,000 at-risk persons to be educated through government messaging.

IV. United Nations coherence in mine action

44. The Mine Action Service chairs the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action,[6] ensuring coherent approaches to supporting affected States and joint assessments of threat situations, and mainstreams mine action into broader humanitarian, human rights, disarmament and development frameworks. The Group is currently developing the next strategy for United Nations mine action, which will come into effect on 1 January 2019.

45. United Nations responses in the field also reflect this inter-agency framework for coordination and coherence. In support of stabilization in Iraq, the Mine Action Service, which implements most of its projects through the United Nations Office for Project Services, works closely with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to synchronize mine action taskings with recovery and rehabilitation priorities. Detailed conflict analysis undertaken by UNDP as part of its Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization ensures that mine action interventions directly support stabilization outcomes. As a result, in liberated areas of Iraq, mine action efforts are centred on the surveying and clearance of key infrastructure sites that facilitate safe return. In the Mopti region of Mali, in response to a spike in the number of improvised explosive device attacks in early 2018, the Mine Action Service provided specific risk awareness training for drivers of humanitarian convoys. The training mitigated the threat of those attacks, lessening their impact on operations and the disruption of vital humanitarian assistance to vulnerable communities.

46. Mine action is also recognized as an integral part of the humanitarian emergency response in the Syrian Arab Republic, where an estimated 8.2 million people live in areas affected by explosives incidents and 13.1 million need humanitarian aid. The mine action subcluster of the Global Protection Cluster brings together 29 mine action partners in regional humanitarian hubs, operating as a forum for the coordination of activities to reduce the impact of explosive devices on civilians and humanitarian workers in the Syrian Arab Republic. For example, during the reporting period, UNICEF and Cluster partners provided risk education to a total of more than 1.3 million beneficiaries, with the majority educated by UNICEF.

47. In Iraq, men make up the majority of casualties from explosive devices, as they are often the first to return to liberated areas and are more likely to be involved in the assessment, clean-up and reconstruction of destroyed buildings. This is just one

[6] The 12 departments and offices of the Secretariat and specialized agencies, funds and programmes that constitute the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action are: the United Nations Mine Action Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization. The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and the World Bank are observers.

example that highlights the need to apply a gender lens in the planning, programming and evaluation of mine action activities. The United Nations Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes provide valuable guidance for field programmes and partners, and I am pleased to note that they are currently being reviewed and updated to ensure that they are well adapted to the new challenges and best practices identified in the field.

48. The Mine Action Service maintains a rapid response and technical support capacity, which deploys experts and specialized equipment to address acute threats or support national counterparts through needs assessments, training and advice at the request of United Nations humanitarian and development entities. In November 2017, at the invitation of the Humanitarian Coordinator, experts were deployed to Burkina Faso to assess the explosive threat associated with Boko Haram in the northern part of that country. The resulting recommendations aimed at reducing the risk will be implemented in 2018, pending the allocation of adequate resources. Experts were also deployed to Afghanistan, Cameroon, Nigeria, South Sudan, the Sudan, the State of Palestine and the Territory of Western Sahara, where they have improved United Nations mine action programme delivery, enhancing coordination with key partners and local authorities and improving their capacity.

United Nations response to the threat posed by improvised explosive devices

49. As noted above, United Nations peacekeepers, Member State security forces and civilians are increasingly targeted by non-State actors using improvised explosive devices, and the United Nations is responding effectively in the field.

50. In addition, at Headquarters, programmatic, operational and technical guidance is being developed to address the threat faced by peacekeeping personnel. The Mine Action Service coordinated the development of the United Nations improvised explosive device disposal standards on the basis of extensive consultations. The standards, which came into effect in June 2018, complement the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Military Unit Manual and the handbook on mitigating threats from improvised explosive devices. Combined, these provide a comprehensive and complementary package of guidance for use in the predeployment and in-mission training of peacekeeping contingents.

51. As part of its capability development project on improvised explosive device survivability, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is developing an annex to the United Nations Peacekeeping Missions Military Engineer Unit Manual focused on search capability, an improvised explosive device technical exploitation policy and relevant threat mitigation courses.

52. In my initiative "Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament", which I presented on 24 May 2018, I noted the threats posed by improvised explosive devices and their consequences for many areas of work of the United Nations. I support greater coherence in a whole-of-system approach to improvised explosive device threat mitigation. Under the leadership of the Mine Action Service, the United Nations will promote strengthened and coherent inter-agency coordination with respect to improvised explosive devices.

V. Observations

53. Landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices are a deadly threat that persists long after conflict has ended and disproportionately affects civilians. Indiscriminate, these weapons do not distinguish between the boot of a soldier and the foot of a child. The disadvantage and suffering that they cause must never be underestimated.

54. Although their detrimental effects continue to be experienced even in countries where the guns fell silent decades ago, much of the worrisome rise in casualties occurs in countries experiencing active conflict. To reverse the upward trend in casualties from landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, preventing and resolving conflict and ensuring sustainable development on the basis of respect for human rights must remain our shared priority. Parties to conflict have a special responsibility in this regard.

55. The increased use of improvised explosive devices, combined with higher levels of technological sophistication, constitutes a growing menace to the safety and security of civilians, humanitarian workers and peacekeepers alike. I welcome the completion of the United Nations improvised explosive device disposal standards as an important step to adapt the United Nations response to evolving threats and conduct its interventions in a safer and more cost-effective manner. In my Agenda for Disarmament, I have noted the need for a whole-of-system and coherent approach to improvised explosive devices, to enable the United Nations to be more effective and integrated in its response. As such, the Agenda stipulates that, under the leadership of the Mine Action Service, United Nations entities will promote greater coherence and strengthening of inter-agency coordination on improvised explosive devices. In the same vein, I urge troop-contributing countries to better prepare peacekeepers for the conditions and threats that they face in their deployments. I fully support the action plan to improve the security of peacekeepers, which reflects the commitment to implementing several measures recommended by General Santos Cruz to increase risk awareness, improve training and build the capacity of uniformed personnel to mitigate explosive threats, particularly the threat posed by improvised explosive devices. My initiative "Action for Peacekeeping", announced in March 2018, is aimed at strengthening the mutual commitment of the Secretariat and Member States to addressing these urgent needs.

56. Given the increases in contamination as well as casualties from mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, it is paramount that mine action considerations remain at the forefront of any planning efforts with respect to United Nations responses. To ensure its inclusion where relevant, I urge the mainstreaming of mine action into relevant country-specific discussions and the planning and mandates of United Nations responses.

57. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reflects the recognition that peace is paramount for the achievement of development goals. Member States acknowledged that there could be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development. Mine action is a precursor to peace as well as to sustainable development, and has been shown to provide important practical contributions to the building of trust between parties, to the benefit of communities on both sides of conflicts. I urge the inclusion of mine action in ceasefires and peace agreements, where appropriate.

58. I continue to encourage affected Member States to improve their national mine action management, and I encourage them to seek the assistance of the United Nations as well as that of Member States. I thank those Member States that have implemented measures to mitigate the risk posed by explosive devices to their citizens, including

by acceding to or ratifying relevant international instruments, as well as those Member States that have assisted affected States in their mine action efforts.

59. As the upward trend in casualties shows, we cannot afford the luxury of complacency. The Portfolio of Mine Action Projects, which highlights worldwide funding needs for essential activities such as clearance, risk education and victim assistance, has a total funding requirement for 2018 of $661 million. I urge Member States to contribute more to mine action, whether through their own efforts, through political support or through sustainable and predictable contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action.

60. Security Council resolution 2365 (2017) constitutes an important milestone in our collective struggle to address the threat posed by landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices. Mine action should continue to have a high place on our agenda. I encourage the annual consideration of mine action by the Council, on the basis of a report on the implementation of the resolution.